

How Philby Stabbed Into the Heart of British Security

Disguised Spy Slipped Past His Lax Superiors

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LONDON — Harold (Kim) Philby's achievement in becoming head of the Soviet section of the British Secret Intelligence Service, while himself being a Soviet agent, must rank as one of the great professional coups in the twisted history of espionage.

Philby later went on to higher things when he became the linkman between the SIS and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, from which position he could give his Soviet sympathizers thorough general knowledge of the operations of both the major Western intelligence agencies.

But there is a classic quality about the earlier achievement. The selection in 1944 of Philby, already a Soviet agent of more than ten years' standing as the man to conceive, build and control a new British operation against the Russians is an event embodying the purest essence of espionage.

Well Equipped

How was Philby able to do it?

First, he was superbly equipped for the role of spy. His marksmanship was excellent, his mind was swift and clear, his nerves were strong. Despite some powerful drinking, he remained physically tough and resilient. He was also extremely attractive to women.

But above these qualities Philby had the capacity to disguise his feelings and intentions, a crucial professional attribute of a spy. For 30 years he lived as a passionate Communist behind the facade of a middle-class Englishman with Liberal-Conservative opinions.

It is still almost impossible to find chinks in the mask that Kim Philby first put on when he was 22. There are one or two clues. His writing was careful and restrained, and many people who knew him recall an elusive sense of distance or remoteness. Rarely did he allow himself to be engaged in such a way as to reveal his inner thoughts.

Had Philby been forced to spend more time in first-class intellectual company during those 30 years, it is questionable whether he could have kept up the charade. But the ineptitude of the British Intelligence Service helped to make his fantastic career possible.

Because the SIS bureaucracy was protected by layers of official mystery, the agency was even less prepared than others in the British establishment to cope with the mid-20th century. The Service was a caricature of the establishment, and so this is an account of a great breach that opened up the defenses of a social class, and therefore the defenses of the nation.

Philby was born on New Year's Day, 1912, in Imperial

India. Ironically, young Philby's Indian playmates nicknamed him "Kim," after the half-caste boy of the Kipling book whose central theme is intelligence work. The boy's father, Harry St. John Bridger Philby, was an officer of the Indian civil service, a distinguished Arabist who, though he came of middle-class background, rejected its ordered virtues for the passionate, egotistic culture of the Arabian deserts. St. John Philby, like T. E. Lawrence, fought to free the Arab lands from Turkish rule and later came to share the Arab belief that Britain reneged on her promises at the end of World War I.

In 1929 Kim Philby entered Cambridge, where he met future colleagues Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean. Philby's political bent was steadily leftwards. His views were expressed more in private, although with great conviction.

Philby had traveled in Central and Eastern Europe during university vacations, and after graduation in 1933 he went for an extended stay to Germany and Austria. It was here and then, in the early days of the Nazi terror, that Philby's resolve was hardened to become a determined Communist, and he was recruited as an agent.

A few months after he left Cambridge, Philby was given his lifetime task—to penetrate British intelligence. Every piece of objective evidence available points to this period in late 1933, and is corroborated by the accounts Philby has given to his children who have visited him in Moscow since his defection from Beirut in 1951.

On Feb. 23, 1934, Philby married an Austrian Jewish girl, Alice Friedman, in Vienna. She was an avowed Communist, and now lives in East Berlin with her third husband.

Philby and Alice returned to London, where he became an assistant editor on a rising liberal magazine. But Philby was to spend the next five years carefully obscuring his left-wing past beneath a right-wing camouflage.

Obviously an excellent way to insulate oneself against charges of communism was to condone Hitler's Nazi regime, which both Philby and Burgess did by joining the Anglo-German Fellowship. Philby managed to have his picture taken at a Swastika-decked dinner. This was in 1936, just before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, which gave Philby another opportunity to establish his public political position.

Philby went to Spain in February, 1937, and began reporting as a freelance writer from the Franco side.

Recently in Moscow, Philby told a friend that he would "have heard a week ago" that the British had



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HAROLD PHILBY

... the Communist disguised as an establishment man.

like a Fascist." He behaved so well, in fact, that General Franco awarded him the Red Cross of Military Merit.

The First Glimmers

When the civil war ended, Philby had completed two years as an undercover Communist in Franco's camp. But was he already spying on the British? There are two bits of evidence.

One is that an officer named Pedro Giro recalls that in a cafe in Salamanca a German agent passed a note to him with a warning against two men then in the cafe. According to the German, these men were British agents. Twice subsequently, Giro saw Philby locked in conversation with the same two men.

Another point was noticed by Sam Pope Brewer, a New York Times correspondent (whose wife, Eleanor, Philby was to acquire 20 years later in Beirut). At press conferences, Kim was always the last questioner and the man who wanted to know just which regiment had made just which move.

Perhaps at this point Philby, anxious to ingratiate himself with British intelligence men, was collecting and passing on any tidbits he could get.

Zany Correspondent

When the British expeditionary force left for France to fight the Germans, Kim Philby went with them as the London Times' No. 1 war correspondent. His colleague, Bob Cooper, thought Philby a wild, slightly drunken and rather brutal young man. Kim, it seems, was addicted to a curious bar game which involved busting a wild, slightly drunken and rather brutal young man. Kim, it seems, was addicted to a curious bar game which involved busting a wild, slightly drunken and rather brutal young man.

his crucial penetration of British intelligence.

These conditions were nowhere better than at the house where young intelligence officers set up residence. Among them were Guy Burgess and a number of homosexuals, heavy drinkers and hangers-on of varying types.

Philby was immediately taken into the department for sabotage, subversion and propaganda. His particular job was lecturing on propaganda leaflet technique. Philby was later transferred to a unit training for unarmored combat behind enemy lines, but his stammer and the fact that his work in Spain had made him known to a great many German military people made it seem suicidal to send him into occupied Europe.

So in the summer of 1941 Philby was recruited for work in the Secret Intelligence Service.

This agency, better known as MI-6, was and is concerned with espionage and counter-espionage in foreign countries. (MI-3, the home unit of the mythical James Bond, concerns itself with counter-espionage in Britain and the colonies). Both agencies had suffered a severe contraction since the palmy days of World War I.

MI-6 had escaped any basic reforms. During the 30s it had done its recruiting in the tradition of the Great Game of the establishment, from the British police force in India and partly among rich, upper-class young men from London's financial district.

It was these men, often

known as "the stockbrokers," who gave the Service its connection with White's Club, one of London's most exclusive men's clubs. This notorious liaison stands at the center of any picture of the wartime secret service. And it epitomizes the rough, dilettante quality of MI-6, of which the rest of Whitehall, and especially the embryonic professionals of MI-5, were to become increasingly contemptuous over the next decade.

Most of the top brass belonged there, including Sir Steward Menzies, the MI-6 chief until 1951 and the model for Ian Fleming's fictional security chief "M." It was to leave Menzies alone with his personal assistant when they were together, since it was understood that they were "running the secret service or something."

White's provided, too, a fertile source for emergency wartime recruits, on the basic English principle that if you could not trust your club, who could you trust?

As for Menzies himself, one former subordinate recalls: "He was terrifying to work with because he acted entirely on instinct. He rarely read a single case right through, yet he often came in with the answer."

Counter-Espionage

Kim Philby became part of Section Five of MI-6 which was responsible for counter-espionage, or more exactly, spying on the German spies. Through personal contact, supplied by his old colleague Guy Burgess, Philby became head of the Iberian subsection.

"Philby just did not have

the contacts to get that sort of job on his own," said one of his colleagues. "I know it was Burgess who rang up someone and got him in."

The Iberian subsection's theater was a vital one. Spain was a neutral, friendly to Germany, and provided the perfect base for operations against Britain's communications keyhole, Gibraltar. Portugal was friendly to Britain, but Portuguese Mozambique was the center of German espionage operations in southern Africa. It was in this connection that Philby sent Malcolm Muggeridge to Laurence Marques and Graham Greene to Sierra Leone.

As a boss, Philby was a quick success. He possessed both grasp and human sympathy, faculties which evidently won him intense personal loyalty. This was to be a feature of his entire career, and it is with an almost unpeakable sense of irony that associates recall the word which they always felt summed him up: "integrity."

"You didn't just like him, you admired him, you were with him," says one man who saw him often from the war until his defection. "You worshipped him."

By 1943, two years after coming in, Philby was firmly established as one of Menzies' very best men. But he early 1944 Philby was getting bored by the limitations of the Iberian subsection.

It was then that Menzies asked Philby, just a few months before D-Day, to revive the defunct counter-espionage operation against

the Soviet Union. To Philby, this must have seemed the ultimate opportunity, and also to represent the ultimate folly of the men above him.

Philby's appointment is a measure of the blind faith in him on the part of his superiors, whose own reputations had been aided by Philby's work. Had Philby's early Communist experience been forgotten? Had it been obliterated from the record by his excellent performance? Or was it, just conceivably, noted and, in a moment of supreme political naivete, ignored?

The aging colonel who was the sole incumbent of the inactive Soviet section was pensioned off, and Philby moved in to build an empire which, within 18 months, occupied an entire floor and employed more than 100 people. Within two years, the section had accumulated a vast store of information on Communists in Western countries, front organizations and the other now-familiar stuff of Cold War counter-espionage. And Kim Philby had acquired the confidence of his staff.

"He could get them to do anything for him," one of them has recalled.

This witness remembers that everyone there came from a strict security background, where the rigid tradition was that office desks should be locked at night. But Kim broke that tradition as he broke so many others. "Don't worry about that," he said, "I'll lock them up later."

"I didn't like to do it," this witness now says, "but he was so charming that I couldn't refuse anything he asked."